



CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

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Guidance on Staff Communication and Engagement with Patients about COVID-19

APRIL 20, 2020

GUIDANCE ON STAFF COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH PATIENTS ABOUT COVID-19

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Communication tips

The purpose of these Communication Tips is to help support Healthcare Staff in conversations with patients diagnosed with COVID-19.

As Healthcare Professionals, you are playing a critical role in identifying, reporting and managing cases of COVID-19 within CSC's Institutions.

As there is currently no cure for this virus, infection can sometimes lead to death especially for those most vulnerable (those aged 65 and older; those with compromised immune systems; and those with underlying medical conditions such as, but not limited to, diabetes, heart disease and asthma).

These are unprecedented times and while most of those who contract COVID-19 will recover, it is important to remind all patients to:

- focus on staying healthy;
- practice physical distancing as much as possible;
- wash hands frequently; and,
- follow their current treatment plans.

Acknowledge fears and feelings of uncertainty

Given the potential seriousness of the diagnosis, patients may show signs of anxiety and uncertainty. Some may verbalize their fears and express anxiety about what kind of care they will receive.

- It is important to acknowledge their fears and take the time to talk about their concerns.
- Asking what they are worried about in particular may open the dialogue.
- They may ask how they contracted the virus. Did they infect others?
- Some may be worried about their family and friends and ask if they can connect with them; some may seek spiritual care and guidance for comfort.
- All efforts should be made to reassure patients they will receive the appropriate medical care and that most with the virus will recover.
- In addition, it is important that patients understand the importance of staying as healthy as possible and to follow treatment recommendations for existing conditions.

Discuss goals of care

When a patient is diagnosed with COVID-19, it will be important to explain the kinds of care they will receive and assure them they will be included in all care planning decisions.

- Discuss the range of outcomes, noting that most people infected with COVID -19 virus have mild symptoms and recover. For example about 80% of patients have mild to moderate symptoms. Older persons and those with underlying conditions (hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease etc.) are at higher risk for more severe disease. Therefore, it is important to carefully follow treatment recommendations for existing conditions to stay as healthy as possible.
- Assure the patient they will receive the care they need, including comfort care to avoid distress or discomfort.
- While there may be hope for a patient's full recovery, this is an opportunity to ask the patient whether they have an advanced care plan, should their condition deteriorate.
- Inquire as to whether or not they have completed a DNR.
- Have they identified a substitute decision maker?
- If no advance care planning is in place, initiate the conversation and document the patient's wishes.
- Ask if they have any wishes or messages for loved ones and assure them, you will do your best, within your power, to convey those messages.

Be honest, direct and empathic

- It is important to be honest, direct and empathetic when talking with a patient who has been diagnosed with COVID-19.
- Start the conversation early while the patient is well enough and has the energy for the discussion.
- As some patients may have limited literacy skills, it is important that the information shared, be in words the patient understands so they are better able to participate in discussions about their future care.
- You may also wish to take the time to explain the extra precautions Healthcare Staff are taking (i.e. face masks, gloves, etc.) to avoid the spread of the virus.

Take a moment to prepare yourself for the conversation

- You may be very familiar with the patient as you may have been providing healthcare to them for many years, especially those with underlying chronic conditions. They will be looking to you for reassurance that they are being kept as safe as possible.
- Given that the information on COVID -19 is evolving daily, provide a response based on the most current messaging from Public Health.
- Some discussions will not be easy. Take a moment, to gather your thoughts.

This is a difficult time in healthcare especially for those providing care in challenging environments such as correctional institutions. We recognize that as you come to work every day in CSC, you may also be worried about family and friends at home. We thank you for your professionalism, dedication and service.

CSC Health Services, April 20, 2020

Sources:

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- *What Recovery from COVID-19 Looks Like, Public Health, Scientific American; April 11, 2020.*